

'Most children learn how to swear before they even know the alphabet': Forget the ABC, toddlers prefer the F word

- **0.7% of all English spoken language is swearing**
- **Many children learn swear words before the alphabet**
- **Bad language dates to Romans and Anglo-Saxons**

By Hugo and David Gardner

Most children learn how to swear before they even know the alphabet, according to a new book that examines bad language and its origins.

English speakers also use a curse word on average once in every 140 words, roughly the same proportion as the first person plural pronouns such as 'we', 'us' and 'our.'

The surprising preponderance of swearing in everyday language probably explains why the majority of children know at least one obscene word by the age of two, says language expert Dr. Mellissa Mohr, from Stanford University in California.



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It really 'kicks off', she adds, around the ages of three and four.

She claims that over an average day around 0.7 per cent of English language consists of swear words. In her new book, 'Holy Sh*t: A Brief History of Swearing,' Dr. Mohr claims the upper classes are just as likely to turn the air blue as less educated working class people.

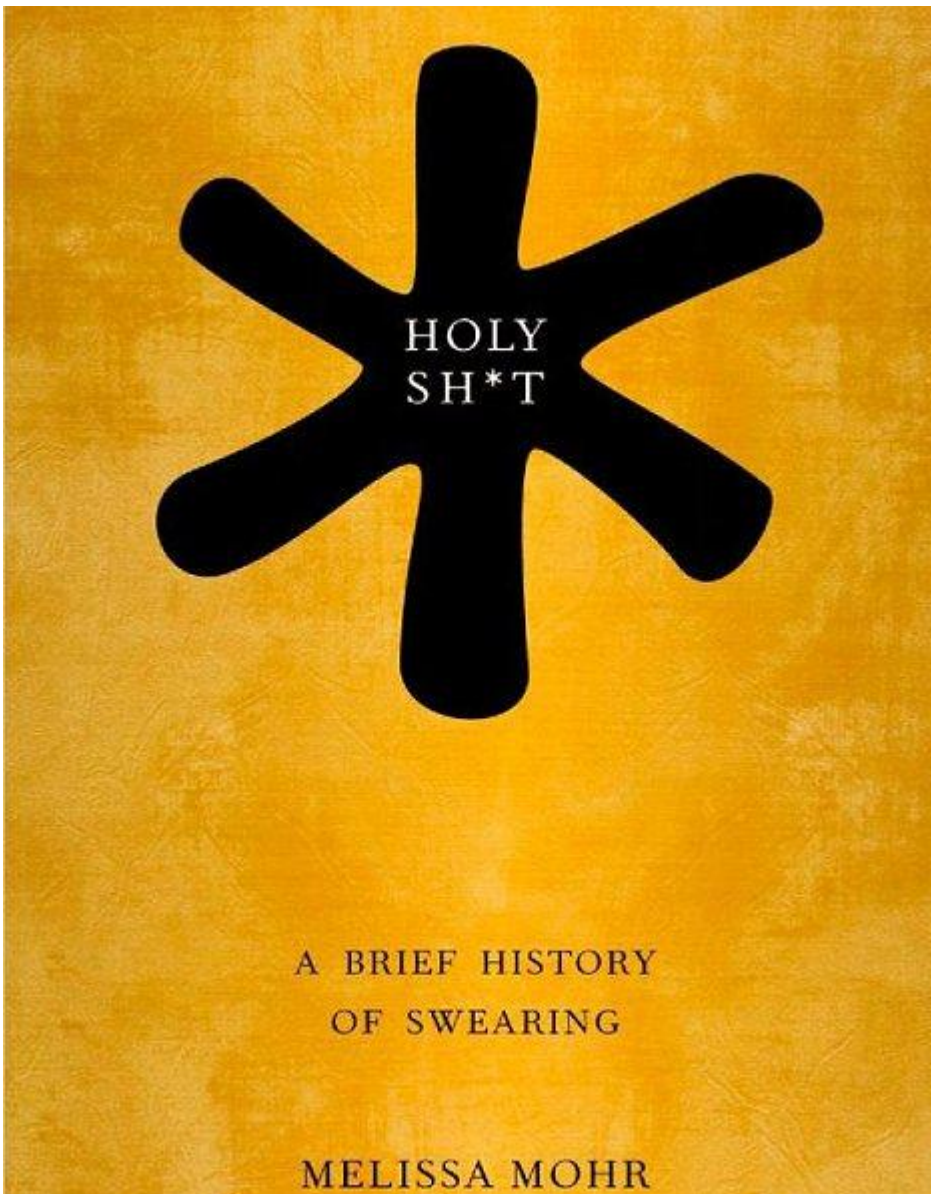
The group least likely to use swear words, says the researcher, is the middle class.

'This goes back to the Victorian era idea that you get control over your language and your deportment, which indicates that you are a proper, good person and this is a sign of your morality and awareness of social rules,' she said. 'Aristocrats have a secure position in society, so they can say whatever they want — and may even make a show of doing so,' she adds.

Dr. Mohr said her book sets out to correct some misconceptions people have about swearing.



Swearing: But the bad language used by The Thick of It's Malcolm Tucker, played by Peter Capaldi, is not a sign of laziness or bad education



Research: Melissa Mohr's new book reveals the surprising truth behind the everyday life of taboo swear words

Rather than lazy language, obscenities can have practical uses, such as providing relief from pain if a person gets hurt, for instance when you hit your hand with a hammer.

Studies have shown that swearing sometimes has a genuine physiological effect on the body.

Swearing also helps to form social solidarity - for example, when workers use swear words while talking about their managers, it builds an 'in-group' which aids social and professional interaction. Dr. Mohr, who holds a PhD in Renaissance literature from Stanford, also told Time magazine that swearing is nothing new.

The Romans, like us, used taboo words relating to sexuality as insults, while the word 's***' originated in the Old English language of the Anglo-Saxons.